

*Read the transcript of the message:*

Marsh Academy is a school in my own diocese of Canterbury. Today, I've been meeting and chatting to some of the students – an experience I found very uplifting.

I had the honour to meet, privately, an inspiring boy, who at just 14 fled his homeland in North Africa after soldiers stormed his school and attempted to abduct him. He was saved by a courageous teacher but was so terrified that it would happen again he decided to escape. This is just one example of the many desperate journeys children are making on their own to save their lives.

This school represents the best of what we can do in this country. It welcomes, it loves, it serves, it teaches and equips people and demonstrates our ability to live up to our long established tradition of warmth and hospitality.

It's not a rich school; many families in the area are struggling on a day-to-day basis. And yet this school and surrounding community are astonishingly generous. If they can do it so can we all.

Visiting here brings to mind a chapel in Canterbury cathedral that was set aside in the sixteenth century for refugees fleeing persecution in France.

An inscription outside the chapel calls it a “testimony alike to the large and liberal spirit of the English church, and the glorious asylum which England has in all times given to foreigners flying for refuge against oppression and tyranny.”

Jesus was a refugee – fleeing as a baby with his parents, returning years later to a strange new ‘home’. He tells us to be those who welcome the alien and stranger, the poor and weak. As a nation we have always done so. In today's world hospitality and love are our most formidable weapons against hatred and extremism.

I have met some extraordinary people today, from this area and those who have risked their lives to find safety. The hospitality of people here brings love, hope and joy. If we imitate them society becomes a far better place. I wish you all a happy New Year filled with hope.

